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Mandolin, banjo and fiddle sounds to fuse

By Colleen Pohlig
Emerald Reporter

It's not every day that one gets to hear the tantalizing sounds of an acoustical mandolin, a banjo or a fiddle. Even rarer is the opportunity to listen to three of the country's most renowned musicians in these respective genres — and all in one exciting night of bluegrass, jazz and "dawg music."

The famed mandolinist David Grisman and his quintet will share the stage with the increasingly popular banjo player Bela Fleck and the Flecktones on Monday, Feb. 17, at 8 p.m. in the Hilton Ballroom. Also joining them is fiddler Mark O'Connor, who has recently been near the top of the country charts.

Grisman, the world's leading mandolinist, helped to create what he termed "dawg" music, or new acoustic music, that meshes jazz and bluegrass in an extraordinary hybrid art form.

Grisman's latest release, "Dawg 90," features Grisman's current band while adding the flute and "acoustic" percussion to form what is coming to be known as "third world music."

Grisman produced this album on his own record label, Acoustic Disc. The second and most popular album put out by his company, *Jerry Garcia/David Grisman*, features the two collaborating in a mix of vibrant and exciting bluegrass and jazz tunes.

"I've known Jerry since the early '60s and it was fun to play with a singer that is also a great instrumentalist," Grisman said.

Bela Fleck and the Flecktones have been hard at work revolutionizing the world's ideas of what contemporary music and the five-string banjo are all about.

In their latest album, *Flight of the Cosmic Hippo*, Fleck and his band uniquely blend jazz, funk, bluegrass and rock to create an upbeat and exuberant album.

"I'm proud of the whole record," Fleck said. "We try hard not to make the same kind of record twice, and this new one is very funky."

Fleck and his band opened for the Grateful Dead this New Year's Eve. Fleck said the show has increased the band's popularity; so far, they have been playing to sell-out shows on their current month-long tour.

O'Connor, who used to be the guitarist for Grisman's band, will join his friends Grisman and Fleck with his vibrant fiddle. O'Connor mixes bluegrass, country and jazz into classical American tunes that are bound to please any crowd.

"I'm very excited about the show," said Jason Miller, EMU Cultural Forum coordinator. "Hands down, Bela Fleck is the best banjo player in the country, Grisman is definitely the world's best mandolinist and Mark is on the top of the country charts with his fiddle."

Tickets, available at the EMU main desk, are $13 for students.

Bela Fleck and the Flecktones (above) will blend their banjo sounds with David Grisman's mandolin music in an acoustic show to take place in the Hilton Ballroom on Monday, Feb. 17.

'Slacker' avoids serious plot while constantly entertaining

★★★

FILM: *Slacker* is currently showing at the Bijou Art Cinemas. Rated R.

★ - don't bother, ★★ - wait to rent, ★★★ - worth the time, ★★★★ - a must see

ADMIT ONE

You know what a slacker is. If you're not living up to your potential or taking the easy way out, then you're a slacker. If you don't take responsibility seriously and don't do something "productive" with your life, that makes you a slacker.

A slacker almost never has a steady job. They usually don't have the drives and desires of their parents. They tend to allow life to wash over them without influencing the course of events one way or another.

It's a surreal experience to watch these slackers. There's something undeniably admirable about them.

The filmmaking technique that writer/director Richard Linklater employs is a wise and fascinating one. The camera follows a slacker as he/she rambles on for awhile. After a few minutes, the first slacker might pass another slacker on the street. The camera then follows the second slacker.

Needless to say, there's not a coherent plot. That's not bad since none of these characters can possibly carry an entire film. Watching them in short segments is the only desirable way to see their world.

The characters are too numerous to mention all of them, but there are some highlights. There's a guy who simply deserts his room at a group house. His house mates find a small pile of postcards that give clues as to his reasons for leaving.

There's a young woman who offers an acquaintance an authentic Madonna pap smear (or so she says). Another woman goes into a bookstore, and a man obsessed with JFK conspiracy theories goes over his favorite books on the subject. He says he's working on his own. It will either be titled *Profiles in Cowardice* or *Conspiracy a-Go-Go*.

Two young men in a bar, on their seventh round of beers, discuss the socio-political ramifications of *Scooby-Do* and the *Smurfs* on children and society.

Some of the people featured in *Slacker* might safely be described as having mental disorders. Some are simply extreme examples of disenchanted young people. One thing they have in common is the fact that they live completely in worlds they have created.

There is almost no slacker capable of having a discussion with another person. Everyone is talking to themselves in one way or another.

Slacker is nothing if not eminently watchable. It's also an extremely funny film. Some important points are made about obsessive behavior, but just about all the characters have a clownish quality to them.

The big problem with this film is its ambiguous nature. What exactly does Linklater want to say with this film? Are we supposed to learn from these characters? If so, what are we to learn? Are we being shown that the world of normalcy is so corrupt and morally bankrupt that leaving it as these people do is a viable option? If that's the case, then why not compare slackers with the bourgeois?

What we're ultimately left with is a fascinating and often hilarious film that too often has the feel of a sort of freak show as opposed to a study of behavior as it is almost assuredly intended to be.

But its unique quality of being populated entirely by people whose agendas are not shaped by the rest of society is admirable and definitely worth looking at.

By Lucas J. Gutman
Emerald Contributor

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